

FACE INVESTIGATION

SUBJECT: Apartment manager dies after falling 30 feet from ladder

SUMMARY:

The victim was a 50 year old white male who as a maintenance man/apartment manager in an apartment complex. It is believed that the victim climbed an extension ladder to put up some shutters and then climbed farther to remove a toy from the roof. According to witnesses, it was a very windy day and the aluminum extension ladder fell twice while the victim was on the roof. A neighbor put the ladder back but it appears that the locks disengaged on the extended section of the ladder. The neighbor was holding the ladder with both hands and had one foot on the bottom rung to steady it when the victim began coming down the ladder. As the victim put his weight on the ladder, the upper extension of the ladder slid down and the worker fell 30 feet to the hard grass. The victim died 3 hours later during surgery. The Wisconsin FACE director concluded that, in order to prevent similar occurrences, the employer should:

! Develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes, but is not limited to training in fall hazard recognition and the use of fall protective devices.

! Consider and address worker safety in the planning of projects.

INTRODUCTION:

At 4:14 PM on May 2, 1992, the victim who worked as apartment manager and maintenance person, stepped from the roof to an extension ladder and fell when the ladder collapsed. The victim died three hours later. The Wisconsin FACE director was notified on June 10, 1992 by the Department of Labor Industry and Human Relations, Workers Compensation Division. The police report, medical examiner report, death certificate and workers compensation reports were obtained, the employer was interviewed by phone. The site was photographed and a site visit made on July 10, 1992.

The employer in this incident was an apartment management company that had been in business for 14 years. The company has 50 employees, one with the same occupation as the victim. The victim had worked for the company 1.5 years. The company has no safety officer, there are no written safety policies and no safety training is provided to employees. The employer expected the maintenance man to call in others to handle projects beyond simple maintenance. It not clear if the victim was following standard operating procedures since there is no written and comprehensive safety program.

INVESTIGATION:

The victim worked as property manager and in this capacity went up an expanding aluminum ladder to replace a broken shutter on the 2nd story of a townhouse residence. According to a witness to the incident, several children in the complex requested that he retrieve toys that had been caught in the gutter.

The victim went on the roof for the toys and the ladder blew down, it being a very windy day. A neighbor replaced the ladder but the victim was not ready to exit the roof and the ladder fell to the ground. A short time later a second neighbor picked up the ladder and placed it against the edge of the roof, held it with both hands with one foot on the bottom rung and the victim stepped off the roof and onto the ladder. When the victim's full weight was on the ladder the ladder collapsed. It appears that the locks disengaged on the extended section of the ladder, possibly due to impact when the ladder fell to the ground earlier.

CAUSE OF DEATH: Exsanguination with ruptured heart, crushing chest injuries, fall from height.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Employers should develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program.

Discussion: To protect workers, employers should write a comprehensive safety program that includes hazard identification, removal of hazards and written policies that clearly identify safe work methods. The comprehensive program should include training in the recognition and avoidance of fall hazards and the proper selection of personal protective equipment. The safety program should identify a safety officer and ensure periodic visits to worksites to identify safety hazards and remove them when possible and reinforce safety training. This training is especially important in those occupations where work is frequently varied and done alone as is the case with this apartment manager. Employers should provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as safety belts, lanyards, and lifeline to employees exposed to fall hazards and enforce their use.

Recommendation #2: Consider safety of workers in the planning of projects.

Discussion: All projects in which workers must be exposed to height should be carefully planned before execution of the work. In this case working alone combined with windy conditions and a change in the work task to retrieve the toys increased the risk. Careful planning of the task may have resulted in a decision to do the work at another time when help was available and weather conditions were better.